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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the North Dakota Statewide Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities Facility Staff Training Program. For the past 10 years, the training program, in association with Minot State University, has been available to agencies and their employees who provide services to individuals with developmental disabilities in rural areas. Full-time direct service staff are required to demonstrate knowledge and skills in topic areas addressed in 14 training modules. These skills are taught at provider sites by certified regional trainers. In addition to entry level certification, the program offers advanced certification, an associate of arts degree in developmental disabilities, a bachelor of science degree in mental retardation (nonteaching), and a master of science degree in special education. In October 1992, the North Dakota Center for Disabilities (NDCD) expanded the program to address the increasing demand for paraeducators, particularly in rural areas. In the project's first year, four pilot sites were selected and curriculum development was initiated. The second year saw an additional 14 special education units brought into the program, with the remaining 13 units joining in the third year. Areas of training were developed according to the surveyed needs of program participants and consist of initial and advanced levels of certification. Training modules can be presented through large group instruction, small group format, on-the-job demonstrations, or self-instruction. Participant competencies are evaluated through pretests/posttests that accompany each training module. As federal funding ends, the NDCD has been actively seeking ways to preserve the program. (LP)

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NORTH DAKOTA'S RURAL TRAINING PROJECTS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

Ten years have passed since the initiation of the North Dakota Statewide MR/DD Facility Staff Training Program. Since 1983, the program has experienced a steady growth, maturing and evolving to keep pace with the expansion and training needs of the state's community based programs and services. Critical to the program's success has been the cooperative relationships among the Department of Human Services, Minot State University, and community providers. State certified regional trainers employed by local providers are linked to the University and have helped the system remain accountable to changing agency needs.

Rural Delivery System

North Dakota has a land mass of 70,665 square miles and a population of 625,000--with a population density of nine persons per square mile. Distances between cities are vast. Developmental disability facilities are scattered throughout the state. The training program is a model that uniquely meets the needs of rural states. It provides a "circuit rider", taking technical assistance to the designated D.D. regional trainers working with facility staff dispersed throughout the state. The training program, with its career ladder options, is available and accessible to every agency and every employee providing services to individuals with developmental disabilities within the state of North Dakota.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

Full-time direct service staff are required to demonstrate knowledge and skills in topic areas addressed in 14 training modules. These skills are taught at provider sites by certified regional trainers employed by the service providers. Full time staff must complete the training within 18 months to remain employed with the agency. Providers are encouraged to require the same of part-time staff. In addition,

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agencies and individual staff have the option of selecting from 20 additional modules dealing with aging issues, communication, leisure, behavior management, basic health and working with families.

The training program offers a seven step professional development sequence for career advancement. The steps include an entry level orientation, "position based competency training", a Certificate of Completion of required training modules, Advanced Certification, an Associate of Arts degree in Developmental Disabilities, a Bachelor of Science degree in Mental Retardation (Non-Teaching), and a Master of Science degree in Special Education.

Learning options include formal instruction, on-site demonstration, mentoring and self-study with or without discussion-group participation. Staff may "test out" of individual modules by demonstration of required competencies.

Key program elements include comprehensive but flexible training materials, a statewide system of individual training records, state standards and certification for direct service staff training, a career training sequence leading to academic degrees, and program consistency through time and across the state.

RESULTS

Certified Staff Members

Since the initiation of the training program in July,1983; thousands of staff members have been enrolled and received training. As of June 30, 1994, 2,154 staff members have been certified. These individuals have successfully completed the competencies established by the State Council on Developmental Disabilities which include 14 modules and a series of supervised field experiences. From the 2,154 who received certification, 240 were certified during the 1993-1994 academic year.

Advanced Certification

Minot State University has established an advanced certification program for those staff members of agency organizations who have already acquired the certificate of completion. These individuals now

have the option to pursue an advanced certification program. The program consists of 20 modules dealing with aging issues, communication, leisure/recreation, behavior intervention, sexuality, and nutrition as well as a number of additional practica. Staff members who successfully complete the advanced certification requirements are issued the advanced certificate.

During the 1993-1994 academic year, 23 staff members completed advanced certification requirements and were issued a certificate.

Associate of Arts Degree

The Associate of Arts degree in Developmental Disabilities is an additional component of the training program. Minot State University awards the two year degree upon satisfactory completion of the designated 27 Semester Hours of developmental disabilities course work and the designated 38 SHs of general education requirements. The AA degree course work is available only to personnel employed in approved residential and day programs serving individuals with mental retardation/developmental disabilities.

Since the initiation of the training program in 1983, 91 individuals have successfully completed the degree requirements. Of those individuals, nine completed the degree from 1992 to 1994.

Survey of Graduates

A number of individuals (n=21) who completed the requirements for the Associate of Arts degree in Developmental Disabilities were surveyed. They were asked to respond to a number of questions. Some of the questions and answers are listed below:

Why did you pursue the AA degree in Developmental Disabilities?

- The opportunity was so convenient that I felt I could not pass it up.
- The price per credit was so low it was irresistible.
- It was a wonderful opportunity to get a degree. Many businesses do not offer this.
- The training helped me as a case manager. It updated my previous course work and made my knowledge more current and accurate.

- It was a validation of my 12 years of experience in the field of developmental disabilities.
- It increased my knowledge and improved my job performance.

How did the degree help you in your profession?

- It allowed me to keep my job.
- The training applied directly to the daily requirements of my job.
- It gave me skills to assist the population I serve and confidence to pursue a higher degree.
- It provided me with a good foundation and I have been given several promotions since I completed the Associate of Arts degree.
- I got hooked on increasing my educational base. I eventually completed an endorsement in regular education, grades 1-8, plus a Masters Degree in Severe and Multiple Disabilities.
- It built my self-confidence and reinforced my belief of education.
- The career ladder approach encourages staff members to learn more about their jobs. As staff members achieved levels of training, I witnessed a growth in self-esteem. They began setting goals for themselves. They believed that they could learn and grow.

The 21 respondents when asked to rate the career ladder approach of training on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being poorly designed and 5 very well designed, rated the program with a mean of 4.11.

North Dakota Paraeducator Training Project

Armed with the successful model utilized in the community facilities programs, the North Dakota Center for Disabilities (NDCD), a University Affiliated Program (UAP), expanded and modified the program to address the needs of paraeducators. A three year federal grant was initiated in October of 1992 to design, implement and deliver comprehensive training to ND's 850 special education paraeducators. The program is a collaborative effort between the ND Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the state's 31 special education units, Minot State University (MSU) and NDCD.

Research indicated that paraeducator usage in the state was increasing, especially in the special education field. Reasons for the increase included factors associated with the rural nature of the state

including: lack of certified personnel in some special education areas, lack of resources for more professional educators, and the need for increased individual programming for students with more severe disabilities who were entering the school setting in increasing numbers.

In 1991, North Dakota Paraeducator Training Project personnel conducted a needs assessment survey in the area of paraeducator training. Respondents indicated a need, and desire, for further training to be conducted on an on-going basis, close to the communities in which the paraeducators were employed, (i.e. field based training) for which there were opportunities for advancement (career ladder).

In the project's first year, four pilot sites were selected for training, and curriculum development was initiated. The second year of the project saw an additional 14 special education units brought into the program, with the remaining 13 units joining in the third year. The collaborative effort was highlighted by the establishment of a curriculum review committee consisting of representatives from special education units, the DPI, and North Dakota Paraeducator Training Project (NDPTP) personnel. The committee aids in the production, modification and adaptation of available training materials, as well as development of new training materials specifically geared towards the paraeducator audience.

A Consumer Advisory Council has also been active within the project. A group of five individuals meet to discuss the project's goals, objectives and accomplishments with team personnel. These individuals are themselves disabled, or family members of individuals with disabilities and offer a unique perspective to the project.

Curriculum Development/Career Ladder

The areas of training for the program were developed according to the surveyed needs of program participants. Each paraeducator is not expected to undergo all areas of instruction. The initial training has been placed into a two tier system. Tier one modules are broad based and introductory in nature, and as such are required by DPI for all paraeducators. The four modules that comprise the first step, or the certification level, have been placed into a four semester hour class: Sp. Ed. 105: Paraeducator Orientation to Special Education. The four include:

- Roles and Responsibilities of Paraeducators,

- Introduction to Disabilities and Effective Instruction,
- Serving Students with Disabilities in Integrated Settings, and
- Strengthening Behavior.

Tier two modules are more specifically geared toward areas in which paraeducators provide aid to students and other educational personnel. The next level on the career ladder, advanced certification, is attained when paraeducators take an additional 20 clock hours of training (four to five additional modules)from tier two offerings. These include:

Sp. Ed. 101 - Introduction to Special Education

- Foundation Principles of Value Based Services
- The Team Approach to Individual Education Plans
- Collaboration and Teaming

Sp. Ed. 111 - Health Care and Paraeducator's Responsibilities #1

- Medication Training
- C.P.R. Certification
- First Aid Certification
- Signs and Symptoms of Illness
- Control of Infection and Communicable Diseases

Sp. Ed. 112 - Health Care and Paraeducator's Responsibilities #2

- Epilepsy and Seizure Control
- Positioning, Turning and Transferring
- Oral Hygiene and Dental Care
- Nutrition for Everyday Life
- Feeding Techniques

Sp. Ed. 120 - Introduction to Behavior Management

- Observation Techniques
- Writing Behavioral Objectives and Measuring Behavior
- Introduction of Assessment and Setting Goals
- Achieving Goals and Objectives

Sp. Ed. 130 - Organization of Leisure Time and Playground Supervision

- Recreation and Leisure Training
- Playground Integration

Sp. Ed. 140 - Human Development I & II

Sp. Ed. 221 - Issues in Early Childhood Education

Sp. Ed. 250 - Developing Communication Skills

- Interpersonal Communication
- The Framework of Interaction and Communication
- Recognizing and Responding to Many Forms of Communication
- Increasing Understanding
- Increasing Communication

Sp. Ed. 275 - Effective Transition from School to Work/Adult Services

- Historical and Philosophical Aspects of Transition
- Methods, Regulations and Policies for Effective Transition
- Role of Parents, Schools and Adult Agencies in Transition

As new areas for training come into existence, new modules and classes will be added. The curriculum is a growing entity.

The training is available to all paraeducators in the state. An additional incentive for paraeducators undergoing training is the opportunity to receive undergraduate college credit, once competency is achieved in each course. The paraeducator can receive college credit for a $30 recording fee. Some of these credits can be used toward an Associate of Arts and/or Bachelor of Science (non-teaching) degree. The college credit option has also been approved by DPI for recertification or relicensure of those paraeducators with teaching degrees. The college credit is strictly optional, but has been seen as an outstanding benefit for those wishing to continue their education.

The diversity of the individual special education units in the state (size, number of paraeducators, distance between schools, etc.) required that a number of different options be made available for delivery of instruction. The modules can be presented for instruction in a variety of ways to meet the needs of the various units and the individual paraeducators. Large group instruction, small group format, on-the-job demonstrations, or self-instructional options are all available.

Adjunct instructors were selected by the individual special education units based on experience in the field and ability to work with adults. These individuals received training in materials and methodologies of the project, and then began providing instruction and coordination in

their individual units with assistance from NDPTP personnel. Project personnel have tried to accommodate the adjunct instructor's needs by providing comprehensive materials and instructional aids for each module.

The modules are written at an average reading level, with an emphasis on detailed explanations of novel concepts introduced by the modules. The modules are split into lessons, with objectives, feedback exercises and answer keys to guide self-instruction. Overhead masters and paraeducator notes are also developed for each module, along with a list of various videotaped materials that will enhance instruction.

Evaluation/Record Keeping

Evaluation of competency is achieved through the pre- and posttests which accompany each module. The tests are fairly objective in nature (true/false, multiple choice, matching, and brief listing questions). After the pretest and presentations are completed, the paraeducators will be able to study the modules and complete the feedback exercises in order to prepare for the posttest. If paraeducators do not achieve competency on the posttest, 85% or better, they may retake the posttest at a later time.

NDPTP personnel are keeping track of the training undergone by each paraeducator in each special education unit. This information will be shared with DPI for paraeducator funding purposes. DPI has offered grant monies to the individual units with which to carry out training activities. DPI has also indicated that at the end of the three year grant period, they will begin reimbursing special education units for paraeducators based on the amount of training they have undergone.

Summary/Future

As the federal funding for the NDPTP ends, NDCD has been actively seeking ways in which to continue the training of paraeducators into the future. Training the trainers, updating materials and record keeping are viewed as the most important responsibilities for the project to preserve. NDCD personnel have initiated activities including offering training and materials outside of North Dakota, seeking private foundation training and adapting training to other pertinent populations (regular educators) to accomplish these goals.